Hip Hop Summit Action Network Pres Dr Chavis Speaks in Doha

Written by Robert ID3411
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Hip-Hop Summit Action Network Pres. Dr. Chavis Speaks in Doha

Dr. Benjamin Chavis, President of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), succinctly captured the challenge before the Arts and Culture Leaders Seminar, "It is not so much a clash of civilizations we are dealing with as a clash of ignorance." Filmmakers, musicians, authors, historians, and artists gathered at the US Islamic World Forum in Doha on February 18th to discuss how artistic and cultural communities could contribute to improving understanding and relations between the United States and the Islamic world. Through the universality of the arts, and their capacity to impact emotions, participants agreed that they have the potential to change perceptions, and to help shape how people view themselves and others.

The participants agreed on several key points: 1) positive role models are key and there is a dearth of role models from the global Muslim community; 2) distribution is key; artistic products from the Islamic world rarely penetrate beyond the coasts in the US and have limited reach beyond their country of origin; 3) new technologies have the potential for viral distribution; for new, cheaper modes of production of music and film, and through these two capacities to create new markets; 4)universities offer a good network for distribution and for venues for artists. One participant, Naif A. Al-Mutawa, had tackled the problem of the absence of role models through his comic books "The 99" which feature heroes based on Allah's ninety-nine positive traits. Greater penetration in the US of artists and artistic products from the global Muslim community (including Muslim Americans) also would help. Festival Network President Ian Zaider invited suggestions of Muslim artists to tour in festivals. Salman Ahmed (lead singer of Pakistani rock band Junoon) John DeGioia, president of Georgetown University), Bahman Farmanara (Iranian filmmaker) and Richard Pena (Director, New York Film Festival) all noted the important role of universities in creating, studying, and disseminating culture, remarking that universities can provide alternatives when commercial venues are not an option.

"The market is defined by consumers; consumers change when you create new markets", commented Michael Nozik, producer of Syriana, noting that the independent film market in the United States was significantly shaped through the Sundance Film Festival. New technologies facilitate new methods of distribution, notably the internet, which, in turn, open up new possibilities for cheaper, smaller scale productions in music and film. Rajae El Mouhandiz, a young Dutch-Moroccan musician, observed that she did not sign with a music label, but instead produces her own music. Participants agreed that disseminating music, films, and dialogues virally offered tremendous possibilities for linking people virtually across the globe, and for increasing access to artistic products.

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"Most young people in the US and the Middle East want to know about each other", stated Dr. Benjamin Chavis, President of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN). Rajae El Mouhandiz concurred, noting that young people want to "tell their own stories and hear about others who are like them". New means of communication (cell phones, internet) make this possible, and could be used more creatively to link people across cultures.

Hip-hop music is a global language that transcends differences in nationalities. Dr. Chavis noted hip-hop's Islamic roots when it began 35 years ago in the US. He explained its popularity today noting that young people express both their dissatisfaction with their lives and their hopes for the future through hip-hop. A hip-hop video by artist DMX showed participants how the music and lyrics can incorporate different religions and nationalities.

Source: Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN).

http://www.hsan.org/Content/Main.aspx?pageId=1